CHRIST IN THE POOR:

A

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED AT ST. MARK'S CHURCH, FRANKFORD, PHILADA.,

AT THE ANNUAL COLLECTION

FOR THE

EPISCOPAL HOSPITAL,

NOV. 24, 1859.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

PHILADELPHIA:
J. S. McCALLA, PR., 237 DOCK STREET.
1859.

The only apology for the appearance of this Sermon in print, is to be found in the following request.

St. Mark's Church, Frankford, Philada.,
Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 24, 1859,

To Rev. D. S. Miller, Rector, &c.:—

Rev. and Dear Sir: On behalf of members of the congregation, we request a copy for publication, of your sermon, preached this morning, in response to Bishop Potter's appeal for the Hospital. You will confer a favor upon us, and subserve a cause we have at heart, by giving us an opportunity to distribute it among some of our friends who are interested in the Hospital and other Christian works.

Yours, very truly and respectfully,

Signed, William Welsh,
John Clayton,
Benjamin Rowland, Jr.

THANKSGIVING SERMON.

"But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind."—LUKE xiv. 13.

A SERVICE of Thanksgiving implies a sense of something due to him we thank. Thanks express our gratitude for favors, and they always suppose a desire to do good for the good we have received. If we have had a great benefit, from any kind heart or hand, we can only show our thankfulness, by doing what will benefit or please our benefactor. To offer anything which would offend him who had benefitted us, would be to offer no thanks.

Hence, the great idea of a thanksgiving service is, to do something which will gratify him whose kindness we acknowledge, and the first question we have to ask ourselves is, what will please him.

In dealing with our fellow-men, none would adopt any other rule. When the season arrives when we are wont to show our thanks to friends, teachers and

parents, who have obliged us, what tender investigations are made into the wants and desires of those we would honor, ere we select that which we shall bestow. No one, who wishes to be grateful, greets the ear of him whose head is racked with pain, with bursts of noisy music, however appropriate they may be to others. Now, obvious as this is, there is a feeling prevalent that our thanks are to be measured by our own enjoyment of them and satisfaction in them, and hence, whatever pleases us, is a thanksgiving. A feast, therefore, is the great symbol of it. Hundreds give noisy mirth and parade for their only service of thanksgiving, and yield themselves to unrestrained joy, without asking what will be grateful to him they thank. As a thanksgiving is a remembrance of benefits, and as it must necessarily recall all our subjects of gratulation in the year past, cheerfulness is its natural accompaniment—but as its purpose is to make acknowledgment of and return favors, unless something be done as a tribute to him who is thanked, our mirth is utterly misplaced. It may be a festival, a holiday—it is no Thanksgiving Day. The Fourth of July is a day of joy. Its purpose is to recall the inestimable gift of freedom, the great source and spring of our happiness: we give up ourselves, therefore, to every expression of pleasure with perfect propriety on that occasion, although, even then, the holiday loses its nicest flavor, if the thought of gratitude to our fathers and our father's God, be omitted. But a Thanksgiving Day is a day in which we give thanks

to God, and is altogether a religious day. It is a day taken out of our other days, and made holy, that is, set apart to a special religious purpose, the expression of our thanks to him who has bestowed the blessings of the whole three hundred and sixty-five days upon us. It is precisely like the tenth part (or any portion) of our daily income, which we set aside for God, and appropriate to please Him who has bestowed the whole of our wages or profits or income, upon us. To use this tenth part without regard to his advantage, would be absurd. So with a Thanksgiving Day. It ought to be a day of joy; but our joy, like the objects seen through a colored glass, ought, of necessity, to take the hue of the great purpose of the day, which is, to please him who has bestowed upon us the good things we have been blessed with. To do this, we must, of like necessity, consult him and learn what will give him satisfaction, and what he will feel to be in the way of a return for what he has done for us.

But, it must be apparent to every reflecting mind, that there will be a great difficulty in doing this, seeing how utterly God is exalted above us, and how impossible it is for imperfect beings to seize upon the Infinite, and to commune with him. Unless God has given us some knowledge beyond our natural experience, any attempt at thanksgiving in this sense, which is the only true sense, is an absurdity, and can be nothing beyond the expression of our own complacency, without regard to him. How can we do good to God? How can

we express our gratitude to him, or give him in return for his benefits to us? How can we reach him with words or deeds of payment? It is this which has always appalled man when he has attempted to commune with God. When Sinai blazed and smoked to heaven, it was not the voice of thunders so much as the terror of the Creator, that impelled the people to cry to Moses to stand between them and Jehovah. And when Solomon had walked among the countless treasures which the power of David had gathered, and with the more than royal touch of genius, had bid them stir, and move, and rise and fashion themselves into the living temple, even the glory of that triumph of mind which lifts men highest, failed to give him courage to take hold of God. The Heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, much less this temple I have made, was the thought of that whole day of glory. How much less can any ordinary man hope to reach God, need not be said! It is quite out of any man's power to commune with him, or to return his favors. And, it follows then, that any act of thanks were indeed, useless, if God has not vouchsafed to open a communication with us.

It is this, however, which the gospel teaches us he has done, and by means revealed unto us in his Word—First, by bending down his ear and assuring us that he hears the cry of those who call on him; and Second, by leaving here, on the earth, his representatives, of whom he declares, whatever is done

to them is done to him. And here, my brethren, let me say—had you any adequate conception of this glorious truth, you would feel that, above all other subjects of thanksgiving, this stands forever, that there is a WAY by which we can thank him, even as he desires to be thanked. That beings who are the meanest breath of the Creator, can speak and do, what the Supreme loves to hear and is willing to receive, and that for this, he has opened a *channel* between us and himself. Not the mighty hand that flung over space its drapery of worlds; not the voice that startled universal light from chaos was so sublime as that finger of love that wove a chain, by whose electric links I speak to Deity, and send my offerings to His Infinite throne. No wonder the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. No wonder they crowded the battlements of Heaven, and plunged their amazed sight into such a sea of mystery. The highest archangel of them all, who led the hosts of Heaven, and drove Hell's myriads into reckless doom, veiled his face and trembled when he spake to God, and yet, here to-day, a company of children of Nothing, such as we are, may raise our songs and be heard, and give our gifts and know they are accepted. Yes, dear brethren, this was the first and last of the glorious work of our Jehovah-Jesus, that in his Infinite Grace he framed a way by which our prayers and our sympathies might go up to the throne.

And this way of blessing is a double way. The *first*,

is the work of his Spirit, by which we commune with him. He sent down this Holy Spirit, through whom he permits us to confess our sins, and repent and obtain forgiveness and acceptance, and join in the chorus of the blessed, and sing his praises, and daily go to him with our million-tongued troubles and fears, and lay them all at his feet. And so wondrous is this way of communion, that yonder little babe, lying at its mother's feet, unable yet to lisp correctly its own mother-tongue, and tell its wants distinctly to a brother's ear, can speak full-voiced, and be heard in every syllable in the very ear of God. Yea, so wondrous! that yonder drowning wretch, dying alone out in the dreadful Atlantic storm, whose cry, amid the rage of waters, cannot be heard even by the sea-bird that flaps her wings upon his half dead brow, can send his feeble breath up among the shouts around the throne. This, brethren, is the *first* way. The way of his Spirit, sent down that we might commune with him. And the *second* way, is that by which we can work for him through his representatives. Yes! in order that we might be able to benefit even Jehovah, and DO for him in acknowledgment of what he does for us, he left himself here in certain representatives, whom he has revealed to us in his word. He left those about us who are his attorneys and agents, standing for him, that we might pay him our debt of thanks to-day. Over the wide earth, our dwelling-place, he scattered the crowds of the poor, the wronged, the feeble, the

ignorant, the sinning, the lame, the maimed, the blind in soul and body, and mind. He left no acre of the earth's cover without them. He left no page of the world's story empty of their names. He said they should be always with us. Never a day in the whole chronicle of creation, in which these heralds and emissaries of the highest should not surround his people. Upon the earth, blotted with sin, and spoiled of the glory of Eden, and to some men a mere hell—a field for the growth of weeds of death—for those who believe, who have spiritual eyes to discern things seen by faith, he placed copies of himself, so that they who are his ministering servants and followers, and wish to pour out their love for him, walk, as it were, in Heaven, surrounded by God's own agents, and can do for him all that glorified saints can do (up to the measure of their finite powers), and lay their offerings at his very feet. So far from being away from him, and separate, they are as near to him as the angels who always behold his face. Because the children they meet in their daily walks, look up to them with his eyes. The poor that crowd the ways, appeal to them with his uplifted arms. The oppressed, that groan in the prison-houses of the earth, speak with his lips. The mourners, that darken the chambers of life, weep with his tears. The heathen, that ask of eternal life, utter his voice. The sinners, whom none warn of their inevitable death, shriek in his tones. O! brethren, have you known by what a presence you are surrounded? Have you seen God every-

where in these manifestations? Have your eyes been long since opened, like the servant of Elisha? Have you seen how his hosts cover the hills and crowd your homes, walk in your ways and gather at your doors? When you have longed, in better moments, to speak face to face with him, like Moses, or like John to lay in his bosom, have you known he was so near you? Millions upon millions, without number, of those whom to bless was to bless him, whom to teach was to teach him, whom to feed and clothe, and visit in prison, was to feed and clothe, and visit in prison the Lord of glory himself, because, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

Brethren, if you have not known this before, to make it known to you is my thanksgiving message to-day. If you acknowledge the debt you owe to him, and would pay it—if you swell with grateful throbs of love, for all the countless mercies of your tale of daily life, and would cast in some return that will please him, I am here, as his servant, to call you to a feast. Come, brethren, that have stores of comfort, and money to buy things of all price. Come, those that earn with daily toil their daily bread. Come, youths that are full of hopes, and maidens sunny with smiles. Come, old men, heaped with honors. Come, brethren, to the feast for you all! It is the Lord's feast. He is here! Here?—Behold him! Here are the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and the blind. Here are the feeble, and the troubled, and the mourning. Here are the ignorant, and the sinful, and

the backsliding. Here are the heathen and the outcasts. In their rags, in their chains of misery, in their spiritual darkness, they wear his own livery, they are himself. If you have never known how to serve God, you shall learn it now. It is by ministering to these. If you have never felt you could build up his kingdom, know it now. It is by sustaining these. If you thought you had no work, see! here is your work. Would you work for the Lord, you shall work for these.

This, as I have said, is our Thanksgiving lesson to you, my dear hearers. It is to make you understand what is the true intent of all those calls, which the Church of Jesus makes upon the sympathies and cost of his followers. It is to make you know the real meaning of what dumb worldlings deem our importunity. You live in a world lost in sin, among millions of God's children who perish forever, unless the Gospel be preached to them. If you feel for them, and labor, it is for God himself. He has left them here that you might have a way to pay your debt to him; not your debt of salvation, of course, but of love for his gift of salvation. Come to this house on the Lord's Day, and see the crowds of little children gathered in the Sunday schools —will you refuse your money or your prayers, when they represent Jesus? Out in the world are your brethren in poverty, in chains, in sorrow, in tears. Perhaps you have had no tears for them, no heart for their woes, no sympathy for their griefs. But your souls must open, when you know that what you do for them you do for

him. O! it is a wondrous spell for a Christian soul. It unfolds every sealed-up breast; it softens every frozen pulse; it moistens every dewless eye, to know we can do good to him. Behold him in the temple, at Jerusalem: they bring to him the lame and the blind; they bring to him the sick and the dying. Is there one turned away? They bring to him the poor and the oppressed. Does one cry to him in vain? They bring to him the heathen and the Samaritan. Has he not compassion on them all? Brethren, he who had compassion on all, now sues to you for compassion on himself. How? Sues to you? He asks you to have compassion on the little children, that need to be told his dying love, and he tells you it is to have compassion on him. He asks you to send his word to the heathen, that their souls may be washed in the blood of atonement. He tells you, to help the Chinaman and the African, is to help him. He stands, glorious Saviour! among the sorrows, the tears, the pains of the world. He stands among those who are in bondage, in poverty, in sin; and he makes their griefs his own, and he asks his friends to be friends to them because they stand for him. This, brethren, is my Thanksgiving lesson again. Inasmuch as ye have done unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me.

But we are called to-day to a special feast of thanksgiving, where the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and the blind in body are particularly present. And we are invited to it by one of Christ's ministers, in whom

there is a particular fitness for such an office. Surely there could be no more touching picture for our hearts in this Diocese of Pennsylvania, than to see our beloved Bishop, broken down with service, with his pale, weary face, and sunken eye and feeble limbs—as we see him now, so changed from what he was—coming from his eighteen months sickness, to the door of yonder hospital, and pleading in tender tones for the sick and the maimed within, because his own sorrows have taught him to feel for them. But ah! when sickness struck him down, hundreds of hearts beat with sympathizing cares; from hundreds of lips prayers went up to God; kind hands ministered to him; piety stretched out, hundred-armed, to succor him, and honor, love, obedience, troops of friends waited on him. Brethren, for those he pleads for, none of these things came. They lay, perhaps, in lonely rooms of poverty; hard toil was their companion, and weary, woful days and nights, without friends, or help, or hope, formed the lot of these poor, even before pain, and feebleness and wasting disease brought them to the hospital. Brethren, go with my friend and assistant here, whose office it is daily to minister, also, in the wards of the hospital. He will take you to some bed of wasting sickness where a mother lays. She bears her hours of pain as women learn to bear them. She can endure privations, little food, little warmth, little clothing. She can support the tortures of sickness under which we groan and cry impatient—but her children—O! her children! she has left at home her children! Who

will minister to them? who will watch over them? She stretches out her pale, thin hand, and asks you to bestow the help she needs for her cure, and restore her to her children. Or, he will take you where a father dies, and feels an anguish deeper than the surgeon's knife, and a dread beyond disease in anticipation of the desolate widow and little ones, whose desolation may perhaps be spared them, if with kind hand you will open your store, and give for him the means of care and nursing. Yet, O brethren! it is not for their pale lips and anguished hearts we plead for them. It is because they are heaven's bankers, with whom you may deposit eternal treasures, to your credit in the skies. It is because God, knowing your dying, sinful hands could never reach his throne invisible, has made these his representatives, and told you, as much as you do unto the least of these, you do unto him.

But refuse to give. Refuse the appeals that are made for such charities as these; shut up your purses and your hearts; persuade others to do so by your example; close the doors of this and the other hospitals in our city, and you convert its fair precincts into a battle-field, bloodier than Magenta or Solferino. Behold the lame lying unhelped by the wayside. Behold the maimed, faint and bleeding at the corners of the streets. The sick are burning with fevers, wasting with consumption, eaten up of cankerous sores. Misery and pain are left untended to suffer, rot and die, for Christian charity cannot reach them. But if such a picture could not move our pity,

where would our hearts be when we saw our SAVIOUR, in every mangled limb, and burning eye and fading face. When God looked upon us from these poor and fainting victims turned out by hard hearts to bleed and die.

O, Brethren! this I repeat again is my Thanksgiving lesson, that Jesus who died for our sins, and left us the spirit of prayer, that we might come to him with our guilt, left us the wretched brethren of our race, that we might make return to him for the love that removed our guilt; that we might thank him with true thanksgiving, by doing for him what will please him to have done; that we might heal the very wounds in his bruised limbs, by pouring in wine and oil upon the sores of such as these.

You will go home to-day to your thanksgiving tables, brethren. Before you go, we give you an opportunity to obey the words of the text: "when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." By your gifts to this charity you shall have them with you at your board. How pleasant it will be, to think, as we sit with our families around us, that we have been willing to share even with these. And O! do not forget that when you have *them*, how ever unworthy they seem, you have Jesus at the board.

You remember the beautiful German fancy of the *Christ-kind*, the Christ-child. There is a joyful company in a splendid home. Hall and hearth are all alight—the laugh of children and girls—the song of youth—love and beauty, and peace and happiness. There comes to

the door, a poor, ragged, wet and weary child. His eyes are heavy, his voice is weak, his feet are bare, his hair uncombed, his skin, a-shiver with cold, looks from his loop-holed garments. He asks to enter. They cannot have him there! soiled, and wretched, and sick and fainting, what does he want, amid strength, and health, and joy, and love, and song. Away with him! He cannot come here; let him seek some other shelter. But O! brethren, there was one among them there, who had learned our thanksgiving lesson of to-day, and knew how Jesus often harbored among us in such forms as this. He pleaded for the poor and wretched, and they took the child of misery in to their feast. He was a stranger, and they took him in. He was an hungered, and they fed him. He was thirsty, and they gave him drink. He was sick, and they ministered unto him. He was cold and trembling, and they warmed him. And lo! as they stand around, the goodly company, whose hearts are melted to pity for Christ's sake, lo! from his face passes away the haggard gaze,—instead, it glows an Angel's. The ragged garments drop,—and downy wings, scenting the gardens of the skies, appear. The hair uncombed—rolls down in golden streams, crowned with rays. The feet, the hands,—take heavenly shape, and on them shows a bloody drop, where the nails went in. It is Jesus, brethren! It is Jesus, and he speaks—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these little ones, ye have done it unto me."